European Network of
Socially Responsible Universities

Erasmus+
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Interview with Prof. Eugenio GAUDIO

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SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

What does it mean being a University Socially Responsible?

Talking about university social responsibility means to implement strategies and offer services and opportunities aimed at the social, environmental and economic feasibility of the academic community, defined as a collaborative group of students, researchers, technical personnel and government bodies that co-inhabit a responsible campus and support its responsibility.

How does it apply to university activity? Which are the key elements of USR implementation?

Being responsible also means to have a careful look at what is happening outside the University, reconsidering the cultural value of science, promoting participatory processes in research and innovation, and encouraging the engagement and cross-fertilization with its reference territory.

What are the limits/ opportunities/ risks for introducing social responsibility in curriculum as a cross-training activities?

Staff training in a Life Long Learning perspective, as well as the acquisition of soft skills for students are definitely priorities for Sapienza University.

Educating to responsibility gives us the chance not only to train more aware citizens and more comprehensive professionals, but also to imagine a new sustainable transparent, and participated university campus model.

A campus, for example, able to pay attention to waste management mode, make its disposal process transparent and encourage recycling; to implement and improve energy efficiency policies; to promote gender equality, access to careers, social inclusion.

What are the limits/ opportunities/ risks for creating and exchanging good practices, synergies, knowledge etc.? And in creating any work groups?

Social responsibility, by its very definition, is a shared process, which requires the participation of the entire university community and even of external stakeholders capable of enriching the vision and perspective of the University.

Therefore, I believe that gathering and debating is always an opportunity for growth and deepening, as demonstrated by some Sapienza initiatives. First of all the CUG - Unique Guarantee Committee, a structure foreseen by our national legislation to fight against discrimination and to which we reserve an important address value in terms of strategies for inclusion. Also, Sapienza is leading a working group with other Italian universities for the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers in order to implement transparency and wellbeing in work recruiting policies for researchers.

In this context, particular importance should be paid to gender issues to ensure equal access to careers for female staff, as well as adequate representation within the various University committees.

Our University is also within the University Network for Sustainability, an initiative promoted by the University of Venice and supported by the CRUI.

There are so many groups that today are questioning and come together on the issues of responsibility and sustainability and I think that the real challenge (and a potential risk) is to avoid dispersion or excessive fragmentation of these initiatives, to whom it is important not only to adhere but also to give an incisive contribution.

Do you have any other recommendations, suggestions, strategic partners, ideas or good practices to highlight or to consider?

I believe that an activity of fundraising and networking, especially at international level, specifically aimed at supporting initiatives on university responsibility or RRI - responsible research and innovation is of great interest for us.

This activity ties in with a double purpose: to encourage the creation of international exchange and support networks by setting up partnerships, even better if public-private, and to promote new processes of involvement and commitment with the territory and the society.

Nowadays, dealing with research and innovation, implies to face a paradigm shift with respect to the "engagement" model: we are moving from the concept of public awareness,

which was in fact designed only to inform stakeholders, to that, of European origin, of science with and for society, with the aim of restoring science to its role as a fundamental component of modern culture. The society, therefore, is recognized as a subject not only interested in learning about or in using the results of scientific research and innovation, but also as a co-protagonist in the definition of the scientific agenda. The European Commission, especially with the Horizon 2020 program, offers the right emphasis to these values and these new perspectives and has allocated a budget dedicated to collaborative projects on the topic. Sapienza has already intercepted this opportunity, but intends to upgrade it in a more meaningful way to promote its activities in the area of responsibility.

All the above mentioned perfectly fits into the concept of accountability of the University, which is embodied in the ability to be transparent in activities and procedures and, because of this, to be available for a bottom up assessment, which goes to hand in hand with evaluation processes presented periodically to the national agencies responsible for this purpose. In this sense, the annual preparation of the social budget of the university is the instrument with which we account our teaching, research, innovation and engagement activities.